DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 342 036 CS 507 729

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TITLE The Relationship between Self-Disclosure and Perceived Intercultural Effectiveness.
PUB DATE Nov 91
NOTE 26p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (77th, Atlanta, GA, October 31-November 3, 1991).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Analysis of Variance; Communication Research; Communication Skills; Correlation; *Foreign Students; Higher Education; *Intercultural Communication; *Interpersonal Communication; *Interpersonal Competence; Intimacy; Multiple Regression Analysis; *Self Disclosure (Individuals)
IDENTIFIERS Asian Students; *Cultural Adjustment

ABSTRACT

A study examined the relationships between self-disclosure and perceived intercultural effectiveness. Subjects, 129 foreign students from Asia attending a large midwestern university and a large eastern university in the United States, completed two sets of questionnaires. Results from Pearson product-moment correlation, canonical analysis, and stepwise multiple regression analysis showed: (1) positive relationships between intent, honesty, and positiveness of self-disclosure and intercultural effectiveness; and (2) negative relationships between amount and depth of self-disclosure and intercultural effectiveness. Results of one-way analysis of variance on self-disclosure and intercultural effectiveness further indicated the differences among subjects from different nations. Findings suggest that, for Asians, the amount and depth of self-disclosure were the least important elements in forming an intimate relationship. (Three tables of data are included; 58 references are attached.) (Author/RS)

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The Relationship Between Self-Disclosure and Perceived Intercultural Effectiveness

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of Speech Communication Association, November, 1991. Atlanta, Georgeia.

CS507729

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ABSTRACT

The study was designed to examine the relationships between self-disclosure and perceived intercultural effectiveness. In the study, 129 foreign students from Asia were used to fill out two sets of questionnaires. Results from Pearson product-moment correlations, canonical analysis and stepwise multiple regression analysis showed positive relationships between intent, honesty, and positiveness of self-disclosure and intercultural effectiveness. These results also showed negative relationships between amount and depth of self-disclosure and intercultural effectiveness. Results of one-way analysis of variance on self-disclosure and intercultural effectiveness further indicated the differences among subjects from different nations. Limitations and directions for future research were also discussed.

The Relationship Between Self-Disclosure and Perceived Intercultural Effectiveness

A prominent line of intercultural communication research has been to identify the components of effective communication in a new environment. Intraculturally, self-disclosure is one of the components that has been found to have a positive impact on effective communication (Bochner & Kelly, 1974; Duran, 1983, Parks, 1976; Rubin, 1982a, 1982b; Wheeless & Duran, 1982). Of concern in this study is the role self-disclosure plays in the process of intercultural communication. Specifically, the study asks the question: Is self-disclosure accounted for as a component of intercultural effectiveness?

Although a wide variety of intercultural communication studies have confirmed the positive relationships between those communication skills relating to self-disclosure such as interaction management, message skills, open-mindedness, and communication effectiveness (Barna, 1979; Benson, 1978; Chen, 1989, 1990; Dodd, 1987; Gudykunst, Wiseman, & Hammer, 1977; Hautaluoa & Kaman, 1975; Kim, 1988; Maretzki, 1965; Mumford, 1975; Ruben, 1976, 1977; Ruben & Kealey, 1979; Spitzberg, 1989), very little research has directly investigated the impact of self-disclosure on effective communication in the process of intercultural adjustment.

One reason for this pausity of study on self-disclosure in the process of intercultural adjustment is probably the involvement of "culture." The concept of "culture" has complicated the

identification of self-disclosure as one of the key elements of intercultural effectiveness. For example, Yum (1988) indicated that the Eastern people, especially those under the influence of Confucianism, emphasize the indirect communication in which "the receiver's sensitivity and ability to capture the under-the-surface meaning and to discern implicit meaning becomes critical" (p. 385). In other words, if the interactants reach the ideal of "same-heartedness," verbal language becomes unnecessary for communicating (Tsujumura, 1987). This orientation totally deemphasizes the importance of self-disclosure in the process of communication.

In contrast, the Western people, especially Northern Americans, heavily rely on language skills such as debate or persuasiveness in order to judge the degree of the speaker's competence in an interaction (Yum, 1988). This emphasis obviously indicates that self-disclosure is the basis of evaluating the degree of an individual's communication effectiveness.

The different perception toward self-disclosure and communication effectiveness has caused the lack of study in this area. In trying to overcome this problem, this study empirically investigated the relationship of self-disclosure and intercultural effectiveness.

Self-disclosure, defined as the willingness of individuals to reveal private information about themselves to others, is conceptualized as a multi-dimensional construct. Some dimensions of self-disclosure include amount, depth, valence, honesty, and

intent (Wheeless, 1978; Wheeless & Grotz, 1976, 1977; Wheeless, Zakahi, & Chan, 1988). Abundant literature of self-disclosure has focused on the conditions for disclosing (Petronio, Martin, & Littlefield, 1984), the characteristics of the discloser and target (Caldwell & Peplau, 1982; Skoe & Ksionsky, 1985; Stokes, Childs, & Fuehrer, 1981; Stokes, Fuehrer, & Childs, 1980), and the differences between cultures (Barnlund, 1975, 1989; Chen, 1989; Stack & Stone, 1983; Wheeless, Erickson, & Behrens, 1986; Wolfson & Pearce, 1983). Although many studies also examined the relationship between self-disclsoure and communication effectiveness, few were applied to intercultural settings.

The study of intercultural effectiveness has shown a diverse focus on the concept. For example, according to Dinges (1983), the study of intercultural effectiveness at least can be classified into six categories: the overseasmanship approach, the subjective culture and isomorphic attributions approach, the multicultural man approach, the social behaviorism and culture learning approach, the intercultural communicators approach, and the typologists approach. All these approaches try to find out what the intercultural effectiveness is, and how it can be effective in intercultural interaction.

Basically, intercultural effectiveness can be conceptualized as the ability of interactants to execute appropriate behaviors and elicit desired responses in a specific environment (Chen, 1990). In a narrower sense, intercultural effectiveness is the ability of individuals to cope with the social difficulties caused by the

host culture (Furnham, 1987; Furnham & Bochner, 1982, 1986). According to Furnham and Bochner (1982), those social difficulties encountered by sojourners can be classified into six dimensions. The formal relations dimension concerns an individual's knowledge of the host culture that leads the individual to act appropriately in formal situations.

The dimension of managing intimate relationships deals with the individual's ability to make friends with the host nationals. The dimension of public rituals concerns the individual's ability to utilize the public or private utilities of the host culture. The dimension of initiating contact involves self-presentation and self-disclosure. The dimension of public decision-making involves making public decisions in the host culture. Finally, the assertiveness dimension concerns the individual's ability to deal with hostility or rudeness. Intercultural effectiveness in this study, therefore, was conceptualized as a multi-dimensional construct including the six dimensions mentioned above.

In order to examine how the dimensions of self-disclosure explain the dimensions of intercultural effectiveness proposed here, three research questions were advanced:

R1: Are there relationships between the dimensions of self-disclosure and the dimensions of intercultural effectiveness?

R2: Is a linear combination of self-disclosure significantly related to a linear combination of intercultural effectiveness?

R3: Which of the dimensions of self-disclosure best predicts intercultural effectiveness?

In addition to the three research questions, subjects' nationalities were analyzed to determine whether or not differences exist.

Method

Participants and Procedures

Participants were 129 Asian students enrolling in a midsized midwest university and a midsized eastern university. Among these participants, 18 were from Thailand, 27 from India, 16 from Korea, 18 from Malaysia, 32 from China (including Mainland and Taiwan), and 18 from Parkistan. Ninety of them were male, and 39 were female. The average age was 25.22. These volunteers were asked to provide information for the study. All responses were anonymous and returned directly or in sealed envelopes to the researchers.

Measurement

The subjects' tendency to disclose to others was measured in this study by using Wheeless' (1978) General Disclosiveness Scale. The 31-item General Disclosiveness Scale is composed of five dimensions: amount, depth, intent, valence, and honesty. The reliability coefficients for these dimensions reported by Wheeless range from .65 to .90, and .69 to .86 in the present study.

To test intercultural effectiveness, the 26-item Social Situations Questionnaire, developed by Furnham and Bochner (1982) was used. This questionnaire consists of six dimensions: formal

relations, managing intimate relationships, public rituals, initiating contact, public decision-making, and assertiveness. Furnham and Bochner did not report the reliability coefficients of these dimensions. In the present study, the reliability coefficients of these dimensions range from .66 to .81.

Results

Research question one examined the relationships between the dimensions of self-disclosure and the dimensions of intercultural effectiveness. Pearson product-moment correlations were computed to examine this question. The results are summarized in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 About Here

The results showed that significant relationships exist between intent of self-disclosure and (a) formal relations ($r = .36$, $p < .001$), (b) managing intimate relationships ($r = .51$, $p < .001$), (c) public rituals ($r = .30$, $p < .001$), (d) initiating contact ($r = .33$, $p < .001$), (e) making public decisions ($r = .23$, $< .01$), and (f) assertiveness ($r = .32$, $p < .001$); between positiveness of self-disclosure and (a) formal relations ($r = .29$, $p < .001$), (b) making public decisions ($r = .18$, $p < .05$), and (c) assertiveness ($r = .30$, $p < .001$); between honesty of self-disclosure and (a) formal relations ($r = .23$, $p < .01$), (b) managing intimate relationships ($r = .51$, $p < .001$), and (c) initiating contact ($r = .30$, $p < .001$). No significant relationship was found between the amount and depth of

self-disclosure and the six dimensions of intercultural effectiveness.

Research question two attempted to investigate the relationships between a linear combination of the dimensions of self-disclosure and a linear combination of the dimensions of intercultural effectiveness. Canonical analysis was used to test this question. The structure coefficients, which indicate the correlation of the variables in one set with the function in the other set, were used to define the variable sets. Interpretation of canonical variates typically focuses on coefficients of .40 or higher. Alpha level is set at .05 for all analyses. The results are reported in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 About Here

The results indicated that three significant canonical roots were extracted. The first root accounts for 46% of variance. Set 1 depicts an interrelated elements of intercultural effectiveness and includes principal positive relationships among the following components: managing intimate relationships, initiating contact, and assertiveness. Set 2 includes positive relationships among intent of self-disclosure and honesty of self-disclosure. In comparing the two sets, then, it would seem that those Asian subjects, having less difficulties managing intimate relationships, initiating contact with host nationals, and being more assertive in the host culture, tend to be more conscious and

honest in the process of self-disclosure. Interpretation in the other direction would reveal that those Asian subjects, disclosing more consciously and honestly, are more likely to be able to cope with the social difficulties caused by the host culture, especially in the areas of managing intimate relationships, initiating contact, and assertiveness.

The second canonical root explains 25% of the variance. Set 1 indicates positive relationships among formal relations, public rituals, and initiating contact. Set 2 includes positive relationships between amount and depth of self-disclosure, and negative relationships between intent and amount and depth of self-disclosure. The second root, therefore, principally indicates that those Asian subjects, having less difficulties forming formal relations, handling public rituals, and initiating intimate relationships in the host culture, tend to disclose more conscioulsy but less amount and depth of private information. Interpretation in the other direction would describe that those Asian subjects, being more conscious but disclosing less quantity and depth of private information in the process of self-disclosure, are more likely to be able to form formal relations, to handle public rituals, and to initiate intimate relationships with the host nationals.

The third canonical root accounts for 14% of the variance. The first set displays a positive relationship between forming formal relations and assertiveness. The second set is determined by positiveness of self-disclosure. The third root, thus, indicates

that those Asian subjects, being more assertive and showing less difficulties to form formal relationships with the host nationals, tend to be more positive when disclosing themselves. Interpretation in other direction would demonstrate that those Asian subjects, disclosing more positive private information, are likely to be more assertive in interaction and to form formal relationships with the host nationals.

To find out which of the five dimensions of self-disclosure best predicts the six dimensions of intercultural effectiveness, stepwise multiple regression analyses were conducted. Each of the six dimensions of intercultural effectiveness was regressed onto the five dimensions of self-disclosure. The results are presented in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 About Here

Results indicated that forming formal relations is best predicted by intent and valence of self-disclosure. Managing intimate relationships is best predicted by intent and honesty of self-disclosure. Public rituals and initiating contact are best predicted by intent of self-disclosure. Making public decisions is best predicted by intent and valence of self-disclosure. Finally, assertiveness was best predicted by intent and positiveness of self-disclosure.

Lastly, one-way analysis of variance was used to examine differences of nationality on the dimensions of intercultural

effectiveness and self-disclosure. The results showed significant differences between subjects (a) from India (M = 4.59) and Korea (M = 3.69), China (M = 4.34) and Korea (M = 3.69), and Parkistan (M = 4.41) and Korea (M = 3.69) on forming formal relations, $F(5,123) = 3.58$, $p < .01$, (b) from India (M = 4.26) and Korea (M = 3.56), Malaysia (M = 4.44) and Korea (M = 3.56), and China (M = 4.14) and Korea (M = 3.56) on managing intimate relationships $F(5,123) = 3.80$, $p < .01$, (c) from Thailand (M = 4.72) and Parkistan (M = 3.94), India (M = 4.76) and Parkistan (M = 3.94), Malaysia (M 4.67) and Parkistan (M = 3.94), and China (M = 4.73) and Parkistan (M = 3.94) on public rituals $F(5,123) = 4.19$, $p < .001$, (d) from Malaysia (M = 6.01) and Korea (M = 4.94) on intent of self-disclosure, $F(5,120) = 3.05$, $p < .01$, and (e) from India (M = 2.81) and Korea (M = 4.50), Malaysia (M = 3.31) and Korea (M = 4.50), and China (M = 3.66) and Korea (M 4.50) on amount of self-disclosure $F(5,118) = 5.17$, $p < .001$.

Discussion

The results of this study are clear and straightforward regarding the relationships between self-disclosure and intercultural effectiveness. The findings indicated that those Asian subjects, being more conscious, positive and honest in the process of self-disclosure, tend to think they are more effective in handing the social difficulties caused by the host culture. The amount and depth of self-disclosure, however, did not show a significant relationship with those dimensions of intercultural effectiveness.

To find out that Asian subjects deemphasize the importance of amount and depth of self-disclosure in an interaction is not surprising. Much literature about Asian cultures has indicated that one of the major characteristics of Asian communication styles is using less verbal language or using indirect communication method (Althen, 1988; Barnlund, 1974, 1989; Becker, 1988; Fieg, 1980; Hirokawa, 1987; Hsu, 1981; Klopf, 1987; Lindin, 1974; Ma, 1990; Murray, 1987; Nakamura, 1964; Nomura & Barnlund, 1983; Okabe, 1987; Toupin, 1980; Tsujimura, 1987; Yum, 1987). Thus, to Asians, a successful interactant is not the one who talks more or shows more feelings in the message, but the one who knows what he or she is talking about and knows how to show positive and honest attitudes in the process of disclosing to others.

The findings of this study indicated an important advance in the study of self-disclosure and intercultural effectiveness, because the results clearly showed the different perceptions of self-disclosure between Easterns and Westerns. For Western people, willingness to talk in an interaction is the key to establishing personal relationships. For example, Altman and Taylor's (1973) social penetration model indicates that in order to build an intimate relationship with others one has to show a high degree of amount and depth of self-disclosure. However, the findings of this study showed that, for Asians, the amount and depth of self-disclosure are the least important elements in forming an intimate relationship.

Therefore, the results of this study showed that caution must

be taken into consideration when trying to apply the research findings of self-disclosure to other cultures. It is quite possible that the self-disclosure construct, especially regarding to treat self-disclosure as one of the components of intercultural effectiveness, cannot be transferred to different cultures.

The results of one-way analysis of variance in the study showed significant differences on the several dimensions of self-disclosure and intercultural effectiveness among subjects of different nationalities. Among them, Korean subjects were the major group that showed some major differences with other groups. For future research it would be provocative to examine what causes these differences from the perspective of a cultural value system.

Furthermore, although Asante (1980) suggested that there exists three broad views of a cultural reality including Afrocentric, Asiocentric, and Eurocentric for the study of intercultural communication, the results of one-way analysis of variance in the study showed that variations exist as well among nations in each cultural reality. For future research, when focusing on the study of the three cultural realities identified by Asante, researchers should not neglect the significance of examining differences among nations in each cultural reality.

Finally, the limitations of this study lie primarily in its scope. The findings were based entirely on the Asian students and thus restricted the range of generalizability of the results to other situations. For future research, to extend the study to

subjects from different continents is necessary. Moreover, the number of subjects in this study was limited. To validate the results future research needs to increase the subject number.

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TABLE 1

Pearson Correlation Coefficients for Variables

Variables	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Forrel	.58*	.24*	.52*	.45*	.70*	.36*	-.11	.29*	-.12	.23*
2. Manage		.18	.57*	.41*	.35*	.51*	-.01	.13	.13	.51*
3. Ritual			.46*	.26*	.18*	.30*	-.12	-.08	-.07	.07
4. Initiate				.38*	.50*	.33*	-.05	.15*	.04	.30*
5. Decision					.29*	.23*	-.03	.18*	.06	.09
6. Assert						.32*	.11	.30*	.03	.15*
7. Intent							-.15	.06	-.06*	.54*
8. Amount								-.01	.48*	-.01
9. Positive									.06	.09
10. Depth										.02
11. Honesty										--

Note. N = 129. * $p < .05$

TABLE 2

Canonical Correlation for Intercultural Effectiveness and Self-disclosure

	Root 1	Root 2	Root 3
Canonical Correlation	.67	.50	.37
Eigenvalue	.85	.34	.16
Wilks' Lambda	.32	.60	.80
Degree of Freedom	30/394	20/329	12/264
Significance	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .05$
Set 1: Intercultural Effectiveness			
Forrel	.34	-.76	.53
Manage	.87	-.33	-.02
Ritual	.18	-.50	-.37
Initiate	.44	-.45	.14
Decision	.33	-.14	.23
Assert	.45	-.23	.79
Redundancy Coefficients	.10	.05	.02
Set 2: Self-Disclosure			
Intent	.81	-.48	-.04
Amount	.13	.62	.33
Positive	.12	-.13	.88
Depth	.34	.89	.08
Honesty	.75	-.20	-.17
Redundancy Coefficients	.13	.07	.03

TABLE 3

Summary of Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis

Source of Variance	R	R^2	F	P	Beta
Formal Relationships					
Intent	.36	.13	18.49	.001	.36
Positive	.45	.20	15.63	.001	.26
Managing Intimate Relationships					
Intent	.50	.25	43.29	.001	.50
Honesty	.58	.33	31.37	.001	.31
Public Rituals					
Intent	.30	.09	12.43	.001	.30
Initiating Contact					
Intent	.32	.11	14.91	.001	.32
Making Public Decisions					
Intent	.22	.05	6.16	.01	.22
Positive	.27	.08	5.13	.01	.17
Assertiveness					
Intent	.32	.10	14.39	.001	.32
Positive	.42	.18	13.67	.001	.28

Note. N = 129.